

# HISTORY OF SPAIN

I

## *OLD STONE AGE*

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## OLD STONE AGE

SPAIN was separated from Africa before the Glacial Epoch, four great ice advances from the north alternating with milder periods. Man is believed to have appeared on the Iberian Peninsula in the first interglacial period when huge mammals, the hippopotamus and the hairless elephant, flourished. During the second and third ice advances the climate of Spain remained mild, and man continued to live in the open, a wandering hunter camping in river valleys or against sunny slopes and cliffs. The final glacial action, reducing the temperature severely, forced him to take shelter in caverns. This original cave man was of the shambling, ridge-browed Neanderthal type.

Near the end of the Glacial Epoch the inhabitants of northern Spain gave way to superior men of the Cro-Magnon race with prominent foreheads and straight limbs, who likewise dwelt in caves. For game these men had both warmth-loving mammals and those typical of a cold climate—reindeer, mammoth, and wooly rhinoceros—besides species indifferent to weather, such as bison, wild ox, wild horse, stag, cave lion, and cave bear. In eastern and south-eastern Spain the peoples used rock shelters as well as caves for their dwellings and lived by hunting the stag, ibex, and wild ox. This first period of man's culture, in which he used tools of unpolished stone, is called the Palaeolithic or Old Stone Age.

For his early implements and weapons man used nodules of flint and pebbles of quartzite and other rocks. Later he broke off fragments of stone which he crudely rounded at the base and pointed at the top. These objects, because they can be conveniently grasped in the hand, have become known as "hand axes". As he mastered the art of splintering flint, he developed bladelike tools and such long-range weapons as spears and darts. In a more advanced stage, he fashioned horn and bone into awls, needles, and arrowheads, and from stag horn he made harpoons. The use of bow and arrow was common at the close of this age.

Primitive art began in the late Palaeolithic period with figures engraved or painted on the walls of caves. These animals, birds, and fish, crudely drawn in outline, belong to an art reduced to its simplest form. Characteristic of early cave pictures in the Canta-

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brian region are the animals traced by the dot method at Covalanas and the elephants at Pindal (Fig. 1) and Castillo. Art had so far progressed by the end of the age that it produced the polychrome paintings in the Cave of Altamira (Figs. 2-10).

It is difficult to conjecture how the artist with primitive means could have drawn with so sure a hand the finely modeled contours of these superb beasts, and yet the curving antler, the hoof poised for flight have a perfection worthy of an Oriental craftsman. With a palette restricted to brown, red, ochre, black, and a little violet, the artist obtained a delicacy of shading and a brilliancy of colour which has not faded. He first engraved and then painted some of his figures, but many secrets of his technique remain a mystery.

The rock shelters of eastern Spain (Figs. 11-20) reveal more of the life of prehistoric man than do the caves of the north, and although various animals are depicted, the emphasis is rather on the hunter than on the hunted. The men bounding along with flying step have as much speed and grace as have the deer and the boar they pursue. What the artist could do with composition is revealed by such subjects as the stag hunt and the battle of the archers.

At the same time that the primitive artist was engraving figures of animals on the walls of caves he began to hew them in shallow relief. Where the walls were coated with clay, crude shapes of bulls were drawn in the yielding surface with a finger. The first outlines scratched on rock were stiffly sketched with a few simple strokes, but the lines gradually took on flexibility and vigour. While early engravings are chiefly silhouettes of deer and horses, in the caves of Altamira and Los Casares, in addition to animals (Fig. 21), there appear a few vaguely human forms. Often the artist took advantage of a raised surface to give roundness to the animal's body and drew his outlines about it. A feline in the Cave of Los Casares shows an attempt to cut away the rock and bring it nearer to the creature's form. Man developed a sense of decoration, engraving objects of horn (Fig. 22) and bone with linear designs. A variety of flint tools was needed for bold cutting in hard stone as well as fine engraving on small bones, and several forms of planers, points, and graving tools adapted to these purposes are known.

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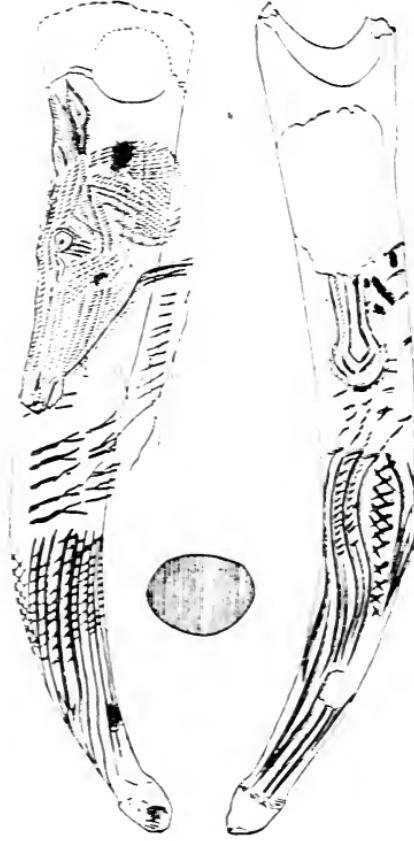


Fig. 22. ENGRAVED STAG HORN

Length ca. 15 cm.

From the Cave of Valle, Rasines, Santander

*Lorenzo Sierra Collection*

(Drawing in Obermaier, Hugo. *Fossil man in Spain*,  
New Haven, The Hispanic Society of America, 1924. p. 159)

On this horn, considered by some to have been a ceremonial staff, are engraved the head of a doe, the hair indicated by hatching, and other decorative designs interpreted as stylized men, packets of harpoons, and the muzzle of an animal.





Fig. 21. HEAD OF HORSE

Cave of Los Casares, Riba de Saelices, Guadalajara

(In *Archivo español de arte y arqueología*. September–December 1934. v. 10, pl. 5, after p. 252)

This head is part of a larger engraving measuring 61 centimetres in width and representing two horses facing in opposite directions, one superimposed upon the other. It shows that the artist corrected the first line of marks for the mane to make the neck broader and more realistic.



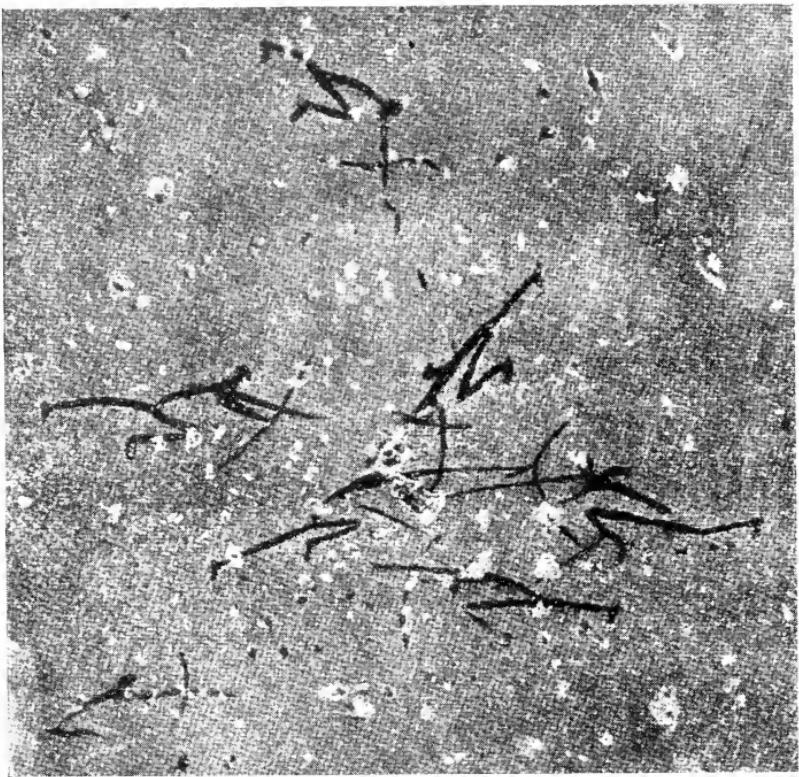


Fig. 20. BATTLE OF THE ARCHERS

Width ca. 33 cm.

Rock shelter of El Roble, Morella la Vella, Castellón de la Plana

(Drawing in Obermaier, Hugo. *Fossil man in Spain*.

New Haven, The Hispanic Society of America, 1924. p. 250)

Pictured here is one of the rare scenes where there are no animals and the warriors fight among themselves with bow and arrow. Lively action is evident in the compact mass of figures which are painted in red.



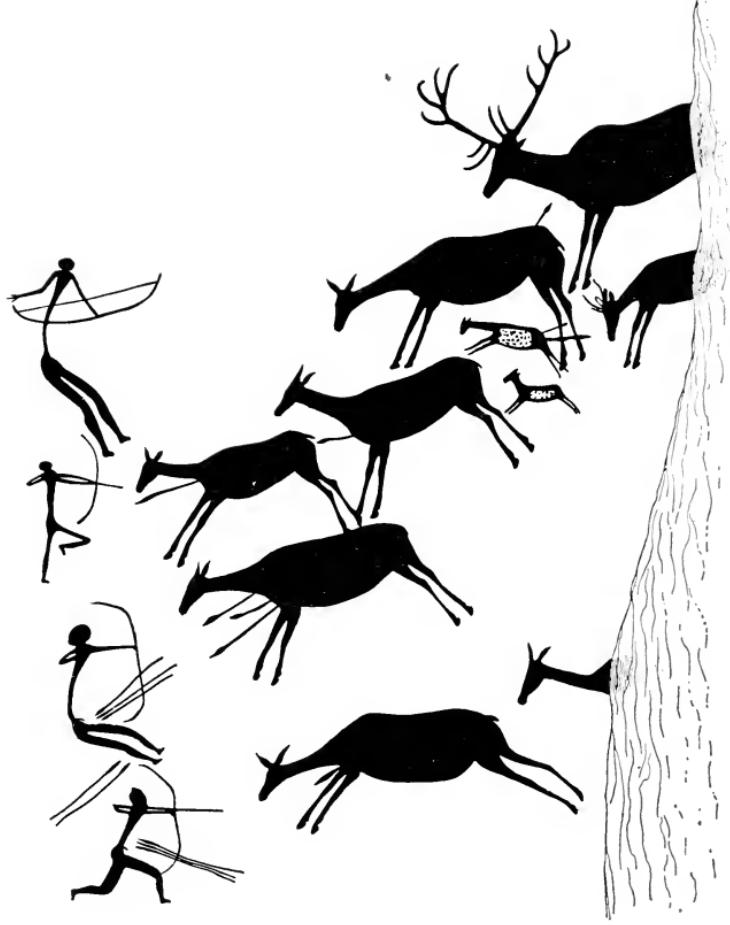


Fig. 19. STAG HUNT

Height ca. 80 cm.

Rock shelter of Los Caballos, Barranco de Valltorta, Castellón de la Plana

(Reconstruction, based on drawing, in Obermaier, Hugo and Wernert, Paul.

*Las pinturas rupestres del Barranco de Valltorta (Castellón)*. Madrid, 1919. pl. 21)

In this composition hunters armed with bows and arrows face stags, deer, and doe. The general tonality is dark red, the hunters being painted in a lighter tone than the animals. The original has greatly deteriorated.



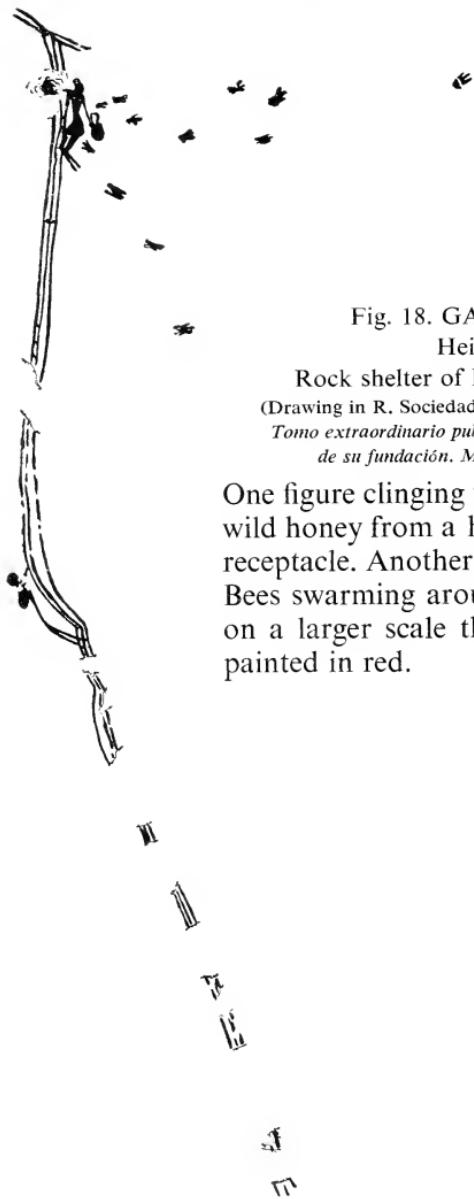


Fig. 18. GATHERING HONEY

Height ca. 72 cm.

Rock shelter of La Araña, Bicorp, Valencia

(Drawing in R. Sociedad española de historia natural, Madrid,  
*Tomo extraordinario publicado con motivo del 50.º aniversario  
de su fundación. Memorias*, Madrid, 1921, p. [64])

One figure clinging to a rope is about to take out wild honey from a hole in a cliff and place it in a receptacle. Another is shown ascending the rope. Bees swarming around the hole are represented on a larger scale than the figures. The scene is painted in red.





Fig. 17. WOMEN IN A SO-CALLED RITUALISTIC DANCE  
Width ca. 67 cm.

Rock shelter of La Roca dels Moros, Cogul, Lérida  
(Drawing in Cabré Aguiló, Juan. *El arte rupestre en España*. Madrid, 1915. p. 177)

By the end of the Old Stone Age the costumes of men and of women had been clearly differentiated. In the black, red, and white painting at Cogul the women wear skirts. These garments reach to the knee or a little below it and hang unevenly as would the untrimmed edges of animal hides. Abundant deerskins were available for material, and fine needles were made of horn and bone; for thread, horsehairs or animal tendons could have been used. These representations in Spain of garments worn in the Old Stone Age are of exceptional importance inasmuch as, at least up to recent date, none has been found in other countries.





Figs. 15-16. ARCHERS

Heights ca. 16 cm. and ca. 8.5 cm.

Rock shelter of Saltadora, Barranco de Valltorta, Castellón de la Plana

(Drawings in Institut d'estudis catalans, Barcelona.

Anuari, 1915-1920. Barcelona [1923] v. 6, p. 452; Obermaier, Hugo and Wernert, Paul.

*Las pinturas rupestres del Barranco de Valltorta (Castellón)*. Madrid, 1919. p. 109)

Hunters were equipped with bows, most of which were large, and with from two to four arrows carried either in the hand or in a quiver. From the way in which the man about to shoot has placed the arrow on the cord there is no doubt that a plume or feather was used at the end of the shaft. Both archers are painted in red.





Fig. 14. WARRIOR

Height ca. 15 cm.—Width ca. 20 cm.

Rock shelter of Saltadora, Barranco de Valltorta, Castellón de la Plana

(Drawing in Obermaier, Hugo and Wernert, Paul.

*Las pinturas rupestres del Barranco de Valltorta (Castellón)*. Madrid, 1919. p. 99)

The warrior is shown as he falls after having been wounded with arrows in the neck, hips, and both legs. He is about to lose his diadem of four lobes set about a circular centre, which resembles actual headrings. The figure is painted in bright red.



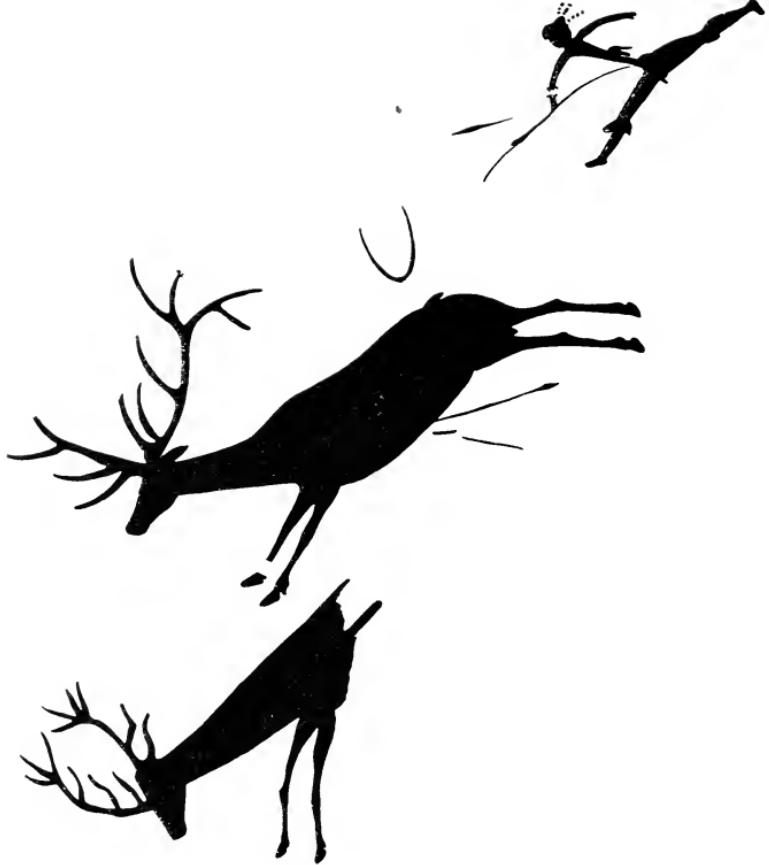


Fig. 13. A STAG HUNT  
Height ca. 46 cm.

Rock shelter of El Mas d'en Josep, Barranco de Valltorta,  
Castellón de la Plana

(Drawing in Obermaier, Hugo and Wernert, Paul.

*Las pinturas rupestres del Barranco de Valltorta (Castellón)*. Madrid, 1919. pl. 26)

The hunter wearing ornaments at head, waist, and knees is in full pursuit of stags, one of which has been wounded by his arrows. This hunting scene, a subject popular in the Old Stone Age, is painted in dark red.





Fig. 12. ARCHER

Height ca. 18 cm.

Rock shelter of Els Secans, Mazaleón, Teruel

(Drawing in R. Sociedad española de historia natural, Madrid,

*Tomo extraordinario publicado con motivo del 50.<sup>o</sup> aniversario de su fundación.*

Madrid, 1921. pl. 18, facing p. 286)

Men, while hunting and fishing, probably wore little or no clothing; in the single instance of a painting in red at Els Secans are breeches clearly indicated. Below them, flaring decorations hang about the knees. Such men's apparel as is suggested in the rock paintings is mainly ornament, usually at head, neck, waist, arms, and knees. Wide, heavy rings for the arms are generally set near the elbow, and on the legs they occasionally appear just above the ankle. Dramatic and conspicuous is the headgear illustrated in other paintings—a lobed diadem, erect plumes, and tall caps with pointed corners.



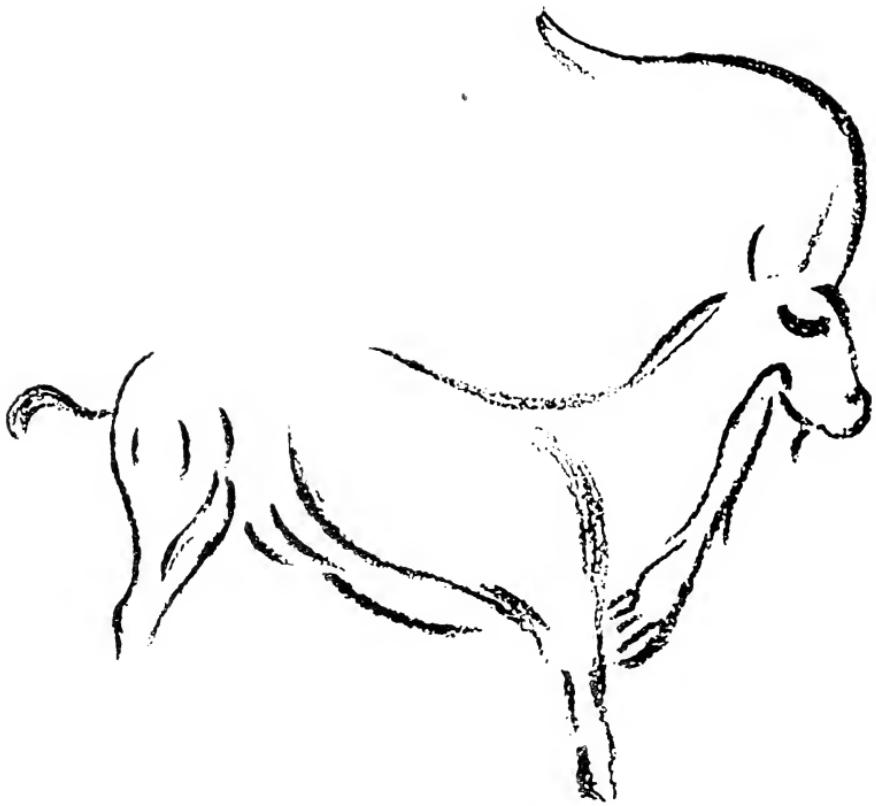


Fig. 11. IBEX

Width 50 cm.

Cave of La Pileta, Benaoján, Málaga

(Drawing in Breuil, Henri, Obermaier, Hugo and Verner, Willoughby,

*La Pileta*, Monaco, 1915. p. 33)

The finest painting drawn in black in the cave is this little figure which resembles goats painted in the Cantabrian caves.



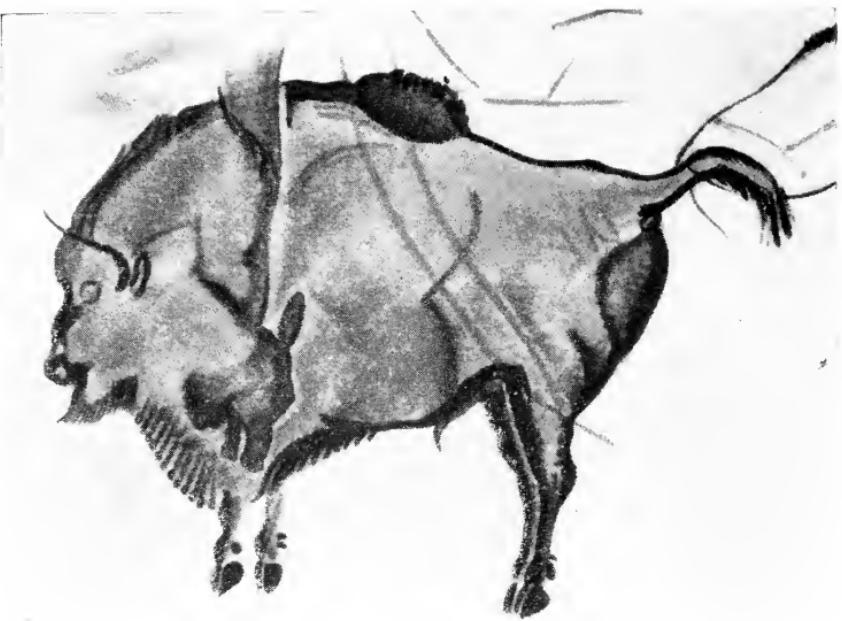


Fig. 10. BISON  
Width 180 cm.

Cave of Altamira, Santillana del Mar, Santander  
(Drawing in Breuil, Henri and Obermaier, Hugo.  
*The Cave of Altamira*. Madrid, 1935, pl. 36)

Superimposed upon the large polychrome which is partly engraved are the head and the unfinished body of a wolf. According to Hugo Obermaier the idea of hiding such an animal as the wolf inside a grazing animal is not unusual.





Fig. 9. BISON  
Cave of Altamira, Santillana del Mar, Santander  
(Drawing in Breuil, Henri and Obermaier, Hugo.  
*The Cave of Altamira*, Madrid, 1935, pl. 33)

Among the many layers of painting seen in this group is an early one, on top of which is a head shaded in black in an advanced technique. The large polychrome at the right, measuring 195 centimetres, is in an excellent state of preservation.





Fig. 8. BELLOWING BISON

Width ca. 205 cm.

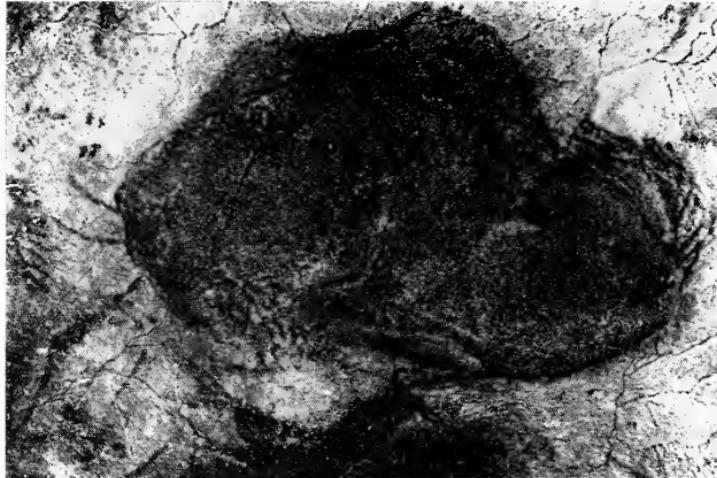
Cave of Altamira, Santillana del Mar, Santander

(Drawing in Breuil, Henri and Obermaier, Hugo.

*The Cave of Altamira*. Madrid, 1935. pl. 29)

The artist has adapted to a rocky boss the dorsal outline of the bison. The contour line is black and the body brownish-red. There are red signs at the top and some lines below the animal, which is superimposed upon a galloping bison.





Figs. 6-7. A BISON  
Width 155 cm.

Cave of Altamira, Santillana del Mar, Santander  
(Photograph and drawing in Breuil, Henri and Obermaier, Hugo,  
*The Cave of Altamira*, Madrid, 1935, pl. 28, 27)

This bison is painted in red and black on a rounded boss of the ceiling. Parts are engraved, and other parts are scraped.





Figs. 4-5. WILD BOARS  
Cave of Altamira, Santillana del Mar, Santander  
(Drawings in Breuil, Henri and Obermaier, Hugo.  
*The Cave of Altamira*. Madrid, 1935. pl. 13, 45)

The galloping wild boar, one of the finest polychromes in the cave, measures 165 centimetres from root of tail to snout. Another boar, 145 centimetres from tail to snout, shows the hind legs and part of the front legs of a galloping boar over which it was painted. Both are partially engraved.





Figs. 2-3. HALL OF PAINTINGS: POLYCHROMES ON CEILING

Cave of Altamira, Santillana del Mar, Santander

(Photograph and drawing in Breuil, Henri and Obermaier, Hugo,

*The Cave of Altamira*, Madrid, 1935, pl. 4; p. [25].)

The cave was first explored in 1875, but the paintings were not discovered until four years later. Although there are no compositions, there are 150 paintings, some superimposed upon others, the subjects for the most part representing animals. The rock roof of the Hall of Paintings, approximately eighteen metres long and nine wide, contains the large polychromes.



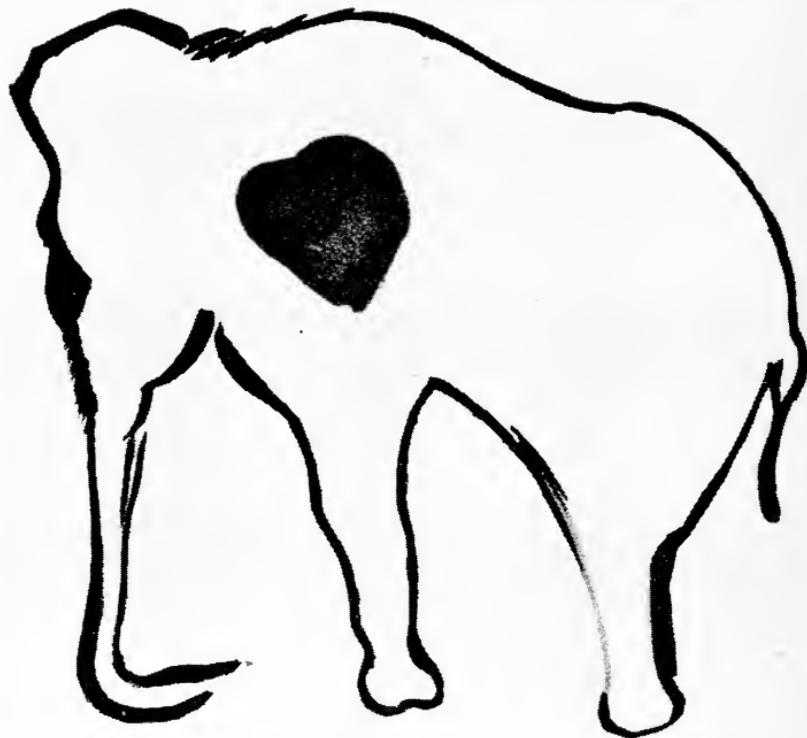


Fig. 1. ELEPHANT

Height 42 cm.—Width 44 cm.

Cave of Pindal, Pimiango, Riba de Deva, Asturias

(Drawing in Alcalde del Rio, Hermilio, Breuil, Henri and Sierra, Lorenzo.

*Les cavernes de la région cantabrique (Espagne)*, Monaco, 1911, pl. 44)

The outline and the heart-shaped mark representing an ear are drawn in red. The presence of the hairless elephant indicates the warm climate of the Cantabrian region in the early part of the Old Stone Age.